



BREAK THE JOBS BILLS LOGJAM

By Senator Norm Coleman

After almost twenty five years in public life, I know that patience is a virtue. But the next few months in our nation's capital would turn Job into a nervous wreck.

We have reached the quadrennial silly season when cute babies, sunshine and the smell of coffee in the morning are likely to be deeply controversial. I see the cause of that to be much more on one side than the other. The American people don't care who's to blame. They want results. But the Senate is a consensus institution and almost all the reluctance to compromise seems to be on one side of the aisle.

We all know the one about the Minnesota man who loved his wife so much he almost told her. In the Senate, every single day the Republican majority faces a minority party that seems to care so much about jobs, they are almost ready to let us pass a bill to create some!

We have six job related issues on the Senate calendar that are being stalled as we speak:

1. The energy bill.

Anybody who thinks energy plan we have in place is working right now rides a bike and has no TV. We are in desperate need of an energy plan which reduces our vulnerability to Mid-East blackmail and stimulates domestic production. The president kicked off the work on this bill right here in the Twin Cities three long years ago.

Passage of that bill might be the single most important thing we could do for the Minnesota economy. The bill is heavily stacked to support ethanol, biodiesel, wind and even animal waste produced energy. Heck between corn, soybeans, wind and manure, we could be the new Saudi Arabia. At least 700,000 jobs nationally are on the line, but we can't get it done in the Senate.

2. JOBS bill

This debate reminds me of the kids story The Princess and the Pea: no matter how much padding we put on, we can't satisfy the Democrats. What's not funny is that we have \$4 billion in European Union tariffs imposed on U.S. products, including those made right here in Minnesota, until it is done. This legislation restructures U.S. tax help to American businesses, especially for our manufacturing sector, and will eliminate the EU's tariffs. It also includes my amendment to stop the unfair triple taxation of farmer-owned cooperatives.

3. Asbestos, class action and medical malpractice reform

These bills may be the best argument yet

why it might not be a good idea to put a trial lawyer in the White House. It is myth propagated by those with a financial interest that reform will leave injury victims in the lurch. The current system delays settlements, denies medical attention and siphons off benefits to law firms and hurts small and medium sized businesses. We can better protect victims by changing the law.

4. Welfare reform reauthorization

Welfare reform has worked. Chicken Little was wrong. We have not turned into a Dickens novel. Callous disregard for the poor is wrong, but so is creating dependency on a system that holds them down. The vast majority of Americans say "move forward" and A few interest groups get Senators to hold it back.

5. Pension fix

This is a matter of whether we want an issue to beat on each other with or a solution for pensioners. I learned a saying in Africa "When the elephants fight, the grass suffers." Make that elephant and donkeys, but the grass is definitely suffering. Thousands of Northwest Airlines and iron range workers have a big stake in passage of this bill. This is a bill unions and management have come out enthusiastically to support. This fix will provide companies the flexibility of fulfilling their pension obligation to their employees and investing in new ideas that will enable them to create jobs.

6. Workforce investment act reauthorization

The president has been accused of not doing enough. The solution is not now to do everything, whether it makes sense or not. The Work Force Investment Act, better known as WIA, needs to be reauthorized by Congress to ensure its funding. WIA provides job training services to dislocated workers. This helps American workers and businesses remain competitive in today's global economy.

They say that if you helped start the fire, you don't get to ride on the fire truck. The Senate minority can't have it both ways. They shouldn't complain that the president is not doing enough on jobs when they are keeping jobs bills from reaching his desk.

But I am hopeful that once the debating points have been made and the political ads have been run, the Senate as a whole will come together and choose policy over politics and give the American people what they want. I just hope the delay doesn't cost us more jobs in the process. After all we have more jobs to worry about than John Kerry's and George Bush's.